But we cannot do without the Tsar and we won't let you talk against him."

This gave me an opening. "All right," I said. "You think you need the Tsar, but we in the cities have no use for him. What shall we do? Take arms, brothers against brothers? Is that what you want?"

"No, we want no killing, but we cannot live without the Tsar."

"That is what your hamlet thinks. But what about other villages? What about the cities?"

Two muzhiks with a rope appeared at the door.

"All Russia is for the Tsar!"

I had regained self-confidence. "If that is how you feel, the dispute can be settled without a quarrel," I said. "Let all the people elect their representatives: from a hundred thousand peasants, one peasant; from a hundred thousand workers, one worker; from a hundred thousand merchants, one merchant. Let the people's representatives come together and establish order. If most people want to keep the Tsar, he will stay; if most are against him, he will go."

"With this we agree," said somebody from the crowd. "Let the people decide."

I continued to develop the idea of representative government. The two muzhiks with the rope stood near me and listened. I was ready to move a resolution demanding a democratically elected Constituent Assembly when the village patriarch interrupted me again. "God knows who you are. We muzhiks don't understand these matters. But we wish no trouble. I say, peasants, let them go."

"Let them go!" agreed the crowd.

"This is the decision of the community, misters!" he announced, turning to us. "Now, damn you, away with you!"

We rode on among high snowdrifts. The failure was unexpected and discouraging. Lazar alone remained serene. For him, this was just a noisy meeting; nobody was hurt and no harm was done. He tried to comfort us.

The road led through rolling country. From the crest of a hill we saw a group of some twenty men on the road. Some were sitting on the snowbanks along the road, others stood in the middle, armed with pitchforks, poles, sticks, axes. A tall man in a sheepskin-lined coat stood in front of the gang with a hunting gun in the crook of his arm. As we approached, he held up his gun.

Eugene and I stepped out of the sleigh and faced the group. Nobody returned our greetings, and the man with the gun asked us, "Where are you going?"

"We are passing through your village," I answered. "The road is free to all, I guess?"